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THE SOURCES OF ONTARIO "PROGRESSIVE" CONSERVATISM, 1900-1914

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The Ontario Conservative administration of James P. Whitney assumed office in February, 1905, and, between that time and the premier's death in September, 1914, it introduced legislation and implemented reforms which gave new direction to the province. The University of Toronto was thoroughly reorganized and placed on a sound financial footing which served as the foundation for the institution's growth in the twentieth century. A series of statutes gave form to the Hydro-Electric Power Commission of Ontario, and a pace-setting Workman's Compensation Act became law. These were the major developments which marked out these nine years of Conservative rule, but beneath were a host of minor reforms, modifications, and improvements: the prices of school-texts were drastically reduced; the numbered ballot — a potential means of violating the privacy of the polling booth — was abolished; the methods of teacher training were greatly improved; the penalties for electoral corruption were stiffened; and compulsory universal smallpox vaccination was introduced.

Many of these innovations represented the direct implementation of pledges made to the Ontario electorate between 1900 and the defeat of the Liberals under George W. Ross five years later. Few of them could be accurately described as continuations of Grit measures because the major items signified a clear break with older policies. The fiscal arrangements made for the University of Toronto went far beyond anything provided by the Liberals. In 1903, Ross had presented limited legislation on hydro-electric development, but it left financing and public ownership to the municipalities. The Conservative enactments on this subject definitely placed financial burdens on the province and gave Ontario a prime position on the North American road to "state socialism" in the development of hydro-electric power with government ownership, initially, of the means of transmission. And, under the Workman's Compensation Act of 1914, the employer was made responsible in all cases of injury to employees — except where disablement lasted less than a week; there was no need to prove the employer negligent before filing a claim — a reversal of previous compensation measures.

Such a brief statement about the important steps taken by the Conservatives between 1905 and 1914 establishes that, coming to office after thirty-three years of Grit rule, they broke new ground; but it does nothing to answer the question of the sources of their inspiration. Nor

does it meet the further problem of judging whether or not there was any point of consistency among the "progressive" Conservative policies. After all, B. Edmund Walker, general manager of the Canadian Bank of Commerce to 1907, and president thereafter; J. W. Flavelle, president of the National Trust Company and owner of the *News*; W. T. White, general manager of the National Trust Company; and Goldwin Smith, the aging but influential "Sage of the Grange," stood solidly with Whitney on his university measures but strongly opposed his power policy.

Some of the answers to the questions concerning inspiration and consistency lie in an examination of Ontario population patterns in the years surrounding the Conservative triumph of 1905. The first decade of the twentieth century witnessed a critical and apparently unalterable change in the nature of Ontario society. In 1901, 42.9 per cent of the population of the province lived in incorporated places; by 1911, that figure had risen to 52.5 per cent.¹ In the space of these ten years Ontario became, quite literally, urbanized, most notably in the south-central region. Agriculture yielded its prime position in the province's economy to manufacturing and business. The Conservatives observed the change and acted; the Liberals, with a few exceptions, failed to appreciate the altered circumstances and, consequently, were unmoved by them. At the century's turn, the Conservatives increasingly represented the new interests of the growing cities and towns and they were rewarded for their perception; the Liberals remained tied to a declining rural population — in some instances the decline was real and, in others, relative — and they were penalized for their insensitivity.

As early as 1900, Whitney hinted that, given office, he might take governmental action to ensure an adequate supply of hydro-electricity for Ontario from Niagara Falls;² by 1902, the Conservative chief was stating that "as far as the ownership of public utilities is concerned . . . the municipalities should have power to purchase them if they choose" and noting that "it would be possible in the near future, having regard to the great possibilities afforded by the development of electrical pneumatic power at Niagara Falls and other waterways, for the Government to utilize such power for the purpose of selling it to individuals and municipalities at cost."³ On another subject, Whitney was talking in this fashion by 1901:

... We have suggested time and time again to the Government that they should weaken the connection — not destroy it altogether, perhaps, but so free the university from the shackles of Government supervision and correction and connection that the university would be enabled to

¹ J. Spelt, *The Urban Development in South-Central Ontario* (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum & Company, 1955, pp. 139 and 165. In 1901, the rural population numbered 1,246,969, and the urban, 935,978. In 1911, the respective figures were 1,198,803 and 1,328,489.

² *Mail and Empire* (Toronto), December 12, 1900.

³ *Ibid.*, February 21, 1902.

breathe more freely and go on more triumphantly towards the goal which they all have in view and which the people of this province desire they shall attain at no distant day.... It is cruel to the University of Toronto to allow it to remain suspended between heaven and earth, like the coffin of Mohammed, until the Government of Ontario decides whether it will be better for their political fortunes to take this side or that.⁴

These new policies were directed towards Ontario's urban voters and that electorate responded.

In the late nineteenth century, the provincial Conservatives had had a strong grip on Toronto and a handful of lesser towns, but Liberal strength in western Ontario had been such as to negate in easy fashion any such Tory advantage. In the provincial election of 1898, however, the Conservatives had captured Hamilton and a few other sizeable urban centres; and this had been sufficient to give the Liberals their first severe scare in a generation because the Conservatives had taken forty-four seats while the Liberals held fifty. Western Ontario, both town and countryside, had made the difference: David Mills, the federal Minister of Justice, had told a provincial Liberal minister that "the district between Oxford and the Detroit River has practically saved you."⁵

The Liberal premier of that day, Arthur S. Hardy, had noted a danger sign in the election when he wrote: "I incline to think that the dregs of the cities and country towns in the new vote went largely in their [the Conservatives'] direction."⁶ But he seemed to possess no idea of what to do to capture the votes of these city "dregs". Another Grit, John Cameron, owner of the *London Advertiser*, complained: "Things have changed. A new electorate has grown up. The crowd are in it as never before." And he argued that "the world is not won by economy nor ruled by logic, but by personality, by prejudice, by instinctive feeling."⁷ But, aside from proposing that the Liberals should attempt to take the public pulse, he had no concrete suggestions to offer. In 1898, some Liberals seemed to sense that they were in rising danger in the cities and towns, but they generally stood helpless in the face of the problem. Between that shock and the provincial election of 1902 the Conservative policies on hydro-electric development and the University of Toronto were largely formulated.

In the contest of 1902, the Conservatives edged closer to power, winning forty-seven seats while the Liberals had to be content with fifty-

⁴ Department of Public Records and Archives of Ontario (hereafter cited as P.A.O.), Whitney Papers, Copy of Whitney's budget speech, February 26, 1901.

⁵ University of Western Ontario Library Archives (hereafter cited as U.W.O.L.A.), Mills Papers, Letterbook I, David Mills to Richard Harcourt, March 5, 1898.

⁶ Public Archives of Canada (hereafter cited as P.A.C.), Willison Papers, Arthur S. Hardy to J. S. Willison, April 1, 1898.

⁷ *Ibid.*, John Cameron to J. S. Willison, April 5, 1898.

one in an enlarged legislature. The Liberal hold on western Ontario slipped slightly because the Tories triumphed in the ridings of London, Essex North, Lambton West and Wellington South. Then, in 1905, when the Conservatives came to power, they shattered the Liberal walls in Western Ontario, captured sixty-nine of the ninety-eight seats in the legislature, and rode to victory on the cities and towns of Ontario. Of the twenty-nine urban centres in Ontario whose population had numbered over five thousand in 1901,⁸ twenty went to the Conservatives in 1905 and nine to the Liberals.⁹ And the Liberal successes in Ottawa, Kingston, Brockville, and Owen Sound can be explained in terms of either personalities or religious issues within the individual ridings. Sarnia went Liberal by only thirty-four votes and Collingwood by just two.

Of the twenty-nine seats which the Liberals held, twelve (Essex South, Glengarry, Haldimand, Hastings East, Huron East, Middlesex West, Monck, Norfolk North, Northumberland West, Peterborough East, Russell, and Wentworth South) could be described as predominantly rural. In eight other ridings (Brant South, Bruce North, Huron West, Oxford North, Peel, Prince Edward, Sault Ste. Marie, and Wentworth North), the Liberals lost the chief cities and towns of each but carried the constituency on the basis of the rural vote. In addition, the Conservatives failed to contest one riding (Prescott, where two Liberals fought it out) which was predominantly rural. In only six ridings (Brockville, Grey North, Kent West, Kingston, and the two Ottawa seats) did the Liberals take a meaningful proportion of the urban vote (the other two ridings, Port Arthur and Simcoe East, could not, in 1905, be described as urban ridings).

The nine Liberal exceptions of 1905 all fell under Conservative sway at one point or another between that date and the general election of 1914. By 1911, there were thirty-nine cities and towns in Ontario whose population numbered over five thousand.¹⁰ Of these, thirty-three fell to the Conservatives in the provincial general election of the same year (eight — Kingston, St. Catharines, Sault Ste Marie, Belleville, Collingwood, Smiths Falls, Pembroke, and Port Hope — went by acclamation) while the Liberals captured only Owen Sound, Oshawa, Orillia, Welland, and Cobourg. A Conservative and a Labourite took the two Hamilton seats. To put it another way: the Liberals held only one (Owen Sound) of the

⁸ *Fourth Census of Canada, I: Population* (Ottawa: The King's Printer, 1902), p. 22.

⁹ Ontario, *Sessional Papers*, XXXVII, No. 46 "Return from the Records of the General Election to the Legislative Assembly in 1905" (Toronto: The King's Printer, 1905), pp. 1-150. The Conservative cities and towns were, in order of size, Toronto, Hamilton, London, Brantford, Windsor, Guelph, St. Thomas, Peterborough, Stratford, St. Catharines, Berlin, Belleville, Woodstock, Sault Ste. Marie, Lindsay, Cornwall, Toronto Junction, Barrie, Pembroke, and Smiths Falls. The Liberal cities and towns were, in order of size, Ottawa, Kingston, Chatham, Brockville, Owen Sound, Sarnia, Galt, Collingwood, and Rat Portage.

¹⁰ *Fifth Census of Canada, I: Areas and Population by Provinces, Districts and Subdistricts* (Ottawa: The King's Printer, 1912), pp. 554-555.

twenty-five most populous places in Ontario.¹¹ It seems safe to assume that the Conservatives formulated policies and implemented reforms with wide appeal to the urban voters of an urban Ontario. The party and the province responded to one another and, in part, out of this response came the progressive measures of the decade of Whitney's premiership.

The development of an urban society was not the only source of inspiration and strength for the Conservatives. In the cities and towns — and particularly in Toronto — there was a cleavage between smaller businessmen and manufacturers and major entrepreneurs and financiers on the subject of Conservative legislation. W. K. McNaught, a Toronto jewellery-maker and sometime president of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association; George Pattinson, a Preston woollen goods manufacturer; and, of course, Adam Beck, a sometime London cigar-box producer, were all Conservative supporters of Whitney. Against them, on the issues of governmental intervention in the fields of hydro-electric development and workman's compensation, stood large men of finance: J. W. Flavelle, B. E. Walker, W. T. White, Henry Pellatt, and William Mackenzie. In 1911, when it was suggested that White would enter Borden's cabinet, McNaught made his feelings clear. "I said," he told George Foster,

that while I had a high opinion of Mr. White I thought it would be a political crime to offer him the portfolio of Finance — & a political blunder to offer him *any* cabinet position.

You know his connections & associations here & one thing more that I might mention is that White is absolutely opposed to public ownership and to Whitneys [*sic*] power policy [-] Two of the things that give Sir James his great hold on this province. White fought our Hydro Electric policy coming into Toronto, tooth & nail and went so far as to speak before the Canadian Club against it when he held it up to ridicule.... It will arouse a bitter feeling & one of distrust in the Borden Government amongst those who favour public ownership should he be appointed to *any* position in the Cabinet *let alone* that of Finance.¹²

Edmund Walker was particularly incensed by the Power Commission Amendment Act of 1909 which stopped legal action designed to prevent municipalities — notably Toronto and London — from entering into contracts with the Hydro-Electric Power Commission; this legislation also validated any previously signed municipality-Commission contracts and ordered the balky mayor of Galt, whose citizens had approved of the arrangement, to sign a contract. "Bankers, bondholders, and financial writers," Walker informed Sir Wilfrid Laurier, "all feel that part of the foundation on which they relied for safety in Canadian investments is

¹¹ Ontario, *Sessional Papers*, XLIV, No. 49, "Return from the Records of the General Election to the Legislative Assembly in 1911" (Toronto: The King's Printer, 1912), pp. 7-164.

¹² P.A.C., Foster Papers, W. K. McNaught to G. Foster, October 4, 1911.

being swept away."¹³ Walker was certainly not alone in such sentiments¹⁴ and, approvingly, Earl Grey, the governor-general, reported to the prime minister that Goldwin Smith had said of the Whitney government: "They have opened the gates of confiscation & closed the doors of Justice."¹⁵

But the lesser lights of manufacturing and industry stayed with Whitney because they were dazzled by the prospects held out by cheap hydro-electricity. And with them stood many of the urban workingmen of Ontario, apparently convinced of the correctness of governmental actions. With the solitary exception of the constituency of East Hamilton, socialists drew little support from the urban voters of Ontario. In addition, there is strong evidence to suggest that, because Whitney healed the breach between the provincial Conservative party and English-speaking Roman Catholics, there was helpful urban Irish backing for the government. A case in point was the constituency of Wellington South of which Guelph was the chief urban centre. In 1901, the Irish constituted just over one-quarter of Guelph's population; one-fifth of the city's population was Roman Catholic.¹⁶ In the provincial election of 1902, Joseph Patrick Downey, an Irish Roman Catholic Guelph journalist, won the seat for the Conservatives, defeating the sitting Liberal member, Major John Mutrie, a Scottish farmer. In this election, Downey came out of Guelph with a large enough majority to defeat Mutrie who carried the four rural townships of the riding.¹⁷ The Conservatives not only drew strength from a growing urban society but, more particularly, from the lower and middle classes of that society; the upper classes — and the farmers — tended to be Liberal supporters.

The Conservatives did little for the large-scale entrepreneurs — aside from angering them — and they were able to act in this fashion because they owed them so little. While Whitney was leader of the opposition from 1896 to 1905, he frequently stared financial disaster in the face and his cries for aid generally went unheeded.¹⁸ Edwin Whitney, his lumber millionaire brother, periodically assisted him out of his troubles and this left the Conservative leader owing few debts, figuratively and literally, when he came to office. In 1901, he wrote to a concerned supporter with

¹³ P.A.C., Laurier Papers, B. E. Walker to W. Laurier, June 4, 1909.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, J. L. Blaikie to W. Laurier, June 11, 1909; E. R. Wood to W. Laurier, June 17, 1909; Burnett & Co. (on behalf of the Montreal Stock Exchange) to W. Laurier, July 8, 1909.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Earl Grey to W. Laurier, April 10, 1910.

¹⁶ *Fourth Census of Canada, 1: Population*, p. 222 and p. 348.

¹⁷ Ontario, *Sessional Papers*, XXXV, No. 46, "Return from the Records of the General Election to the Legislative Assembly in 1902" (Toronto: The King's Printer, 1903), p. 119.

¹⁸ Whitney Papers, Undated memorandum, written in the third person but in Whitney's hand; internal evidence indicates that it should be dated about September 26, 1899. See also: Whitney Papers, Letterbook, J. P. Whitney to R. Grass, September 26, 1899; J. P. Whitney to T. A. Wardell, January 29, 1901.

just a trace of irony: "You need have no fear of Corporations getting control of the party & I fail to see any evidence of any attempt on the part of Corporations to do so."¹⁹ And, after the first burst of Conservative legislation and reform in 1906, Charles Hamilton, a level-headed reporter for the *Toronto News*, wrote to a friend: "And what a ruthless thoroughness in the rush the Whitney people made at these problems. Of course, they had special advantages. They had been out of power so long that the capitalistic crowd had taken no pains to conciliate them in advance."²⁰

Not only were the Conservatives free of "the capitalistic crowd"; they attacked them in speeches both before and after coming to office. R. A. Pyne, who later became Whitney's Minister of Education, charged on one occasion that the Ross government feared the "big corporations" and went on:

The City of Toronto had applied in vain to be allowed to secure electrical energy to give cheap light and cheap power to her citizens and her manufacturers, but was it any wonder when Hon. Mr. [J.M.] Gibson [Attorney-General] was president of electrical power companies? Not only Toronto, but every municipality within 150 miles of the Falls should have this power, but even the roar of the mighty cataract was insufficient to waken the stupid heads of the members of the Government.²¹

Whitney informed a Toronto Conservative "smoker": "The Ontario Government . . . had given way to those who had been plundering and robbing the province, it had gone down before the frowns and stern looks of the corporations."²² The Conservative leader pursued the same line when he spoke of a school-book ring which, he claimed, had a monopoly on its product and charged high prices:

He declared that when the time came the people of Ontario would be utterly astonished at the reduction which can be made in the price of school books. He had not time to expose the workings of the school-book ring, but every member of this ring was an extremely wealthy man, able to build the most expensive houses in Toronto, through the means of Hon. George W. Ross and the determination on his part that the people of Ontario, whose children used text-books, should be taxed to support these school-book barons of Toronto.²³

When, in 1907, an offer was made to sell the Electrical Development Company to the government because of the alleged damages done to it by Conservative "hydro" legislation, Whitney displayed the same attitude. "It would be all right," he remarked facetiously to his brother, "for us to repudiate our contract with the Ontario Power Company and then spend

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Letterbook, J. P. Whitney to A. F. H. Cross, May 4, 1901.

²⁰ P.A.C., W. L. Grant Papers, C. F. Hamilton to W. L. Grant, June 23, 1906.

²¹ *Mail and Empire*, May 27, 1902.

²² *Ibid.*, February 11, 1901.

²³ *Ibid.*, April 29, 1902.

ten or twelve million dollars in expropriating the other people's property, in order that the pocket of Mr. Flavelle may not be injured." ²⁴

Such hostility to corporations could not be manifested by the Liberals, in part because George Ross was involved with them. While premier, Ross was also president of the Manufacturers' Life Insurance Company and men unfriendly to public control of hydro-electric development served with him: Henry M. Pellatt, president of the Toronto Electric Light Company and an associate in the Electrical Development Company, was first vice-president of the insurance company; and William Mackenzie, president of the Toronto Street Railway, was on Manufacturers' Life's board of directors. It was revealed in 1906 that, while Ross was president, the insurance company had dabbled in the Electrical Development Company's stock. ²⁵

Not only were the Liberal leader and his party in positions that could scarcely be described as hostile to corporations and a small, but powerful, group in the developing urban society; they were tied to a relatively declining rural population. These ties prevented a meaningful alteration in Liberal policies and programmes. Ross felt that he could not do more for the University of Toronto when he was premier because he viewed the "University question" as a "most dangerous one." Fearing that the little he had done in 1901 was too much, he wrote to a cabinet member: "Although our followers will stand by us, I am quite uneasy as to the effect upon the country." ²⁶ "I fear very much we cannot give more aid to the University," he told J. S. Willison, then editor of the *Globe* :

It was with some difficulty I prevailed upon my supporters to go as far as is proposed by our present Bill. I also doubt very much if Mr. Whitney will move an amendment granting further aid. Of course he . . . may possibly be induced to endeavor to outbid us for the support of the Alumni of Toronto University. The effect at the ballot-box, however, will be of no consequence if he does. I was sorry to see you give him so much credit for his present course. He was really playing hide and seek until he saw the game was up; then he thought to recover himself by bidding higher for what he thought was popular support than we dared go. I hope to be just to my opponents, but in this case he has got infinitely more credit than he deserved. ²⁷

With his rural support Ross could not go further in aid of an urban institution; Whitney, unencumbered, could. Even late in 1904, with defeat just ahead of him, Ross did not adjust to the changing Ontario society when he attempted to revitalize the party. He rated "public ownership"

²⁴ Whitney Papers, J. P. Whitney to E. C. Whitney, December 4, 1907.

²⁵ J. Castell Hopkins, *The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs, 1906* (Toronto: The Annual Review Publishing Company, 1907), p. 224.

²⁶ P.A.C., G. M. Grant Papers, G. W. Ross to W. Harty, March 19, 1901.

²⁷ Willison Papers, G. W. Ross to J. S. Willison, March 30, 1901.

as of "minor importance" and felt the "most difficult" question was prohibition.²⁸

Ross was giving top-rating to a rural issue and bottom-rating to an urban one. In the light of his areas of support, he maybe could have done little else, but it was not politically wise. The demands of the temperance organizations were not the majority demands of an urban society. S. D. Clark has pointed out in his book, *Church and Sect in Canada*, that when, in this transitional period of Ontario's history, Methodism took on the trappings of an urban church, it divested itself of many traces of its earlier, rural days: gone were the lay preacher, camp meeting, and revivalist techniques and in their place were the articulate, educated minister and biblical criticism.²⁹ Yet Methodism did not rid itself of one of its earlier features: strong support of temperance — or, more correctly, prohibition; and Methodists wanted it to be an important aspect of Ontario Liberalism. The subject troubled Newton W. Rowell, a staunch temperance man, when he came to the Liberal leadership in 1911. In Rowell, Whitney faced the only Liberal leader³⁰ who was evidently prepared to do even more than the premier in meeting the needs of the new urban society. But Rowell handicapped himself from the outset of the uneven battle with the Conservative chief by carrying a cross — temperance — instead of a sword. His cry of "Abolish the bar" was an appeal to a fading Ontario, and it drowned out his pleas for further legislation in the interests of an industrial province. Embarrassingly for Rowell with his urban interest, he had to seek the safety of a semi-rural riding, Oxford North, when he assumed the leadership. And he was soundly rejected in the chief urban centre of the constituency, Woodstock, in 1911 and saved only by the rural vote. In 1914, after he had developed an extensive programme for an urban society, he was even more soundly defeated in Woodstock and rescued once more by the farmers of Oxford North.³¹

Some of the explanations for Ontario "progressive" Conservatism lie with individuals, one of whom was the party leader, J. P. Whitney. The Tory chieftain was once described as

an earnest believer in and advocate of the political doctrines of the Liberal-Conservative party of Canada, and... [was] of that school of political thought which from the time of the retirement from public life of

²⁸ Laurier Papers, G. W. Ross to W. Laurier, November 15, 1904.

²⁹ S. D. Clark, *Church and Sect in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948), pp. 329-346.

³⁰ Arthur S. Hardy led the Liberals from 1896 to 1899; George W. Ross from 1899 to 1907; George P. Graham for only six months in 1907; A. G. MacKay from 1907 to 1911; and Newton W. Rowell from 1911 to 1917.

³¹ Ontario, *Sessional Papers*, XLIV, No. 49, pp. 89-91; Ontario, *Sessional Papers*, XLVII, No. 50, "Return from the Records of the General Election to the Legislative Assembly in 1914" (Toronto: The King's Printer, 1915), pp. 109-111. In 1911, Rowell received 876 votes in Woodstock and his opponent, 1,043, but he carried the riding 2,651 to 2,091. In 1914, Rowell received 911 votes in Woodstock and his opponent, 1,478, but he carried the riding 3,048 to 2,935.

Robert Baldwin, slowly but surely, became alienated from the Reform party, and finally coalesced with and became part of the Liberal-Conservative party...³²

"I have always felt some pride," he wrote in 1912, "in the fact that I come from Liberal (Baldwin) stock, but my class now is *Tory*. And this does not mean Toronto Tory necessarily."³³ He judged himself to be a Liberal-Conservative, very much alive to the times, despite the fact that his own constituency, Dundas, was a predominantly rural one.

Whitney displayed a fine hand for taking the public pulse. In an angry frame of mind, Charles Hamilton once complained to J. S. Willison: "Whitney is confirming my judgment that his sole qualifications are his probity, his obstinacy and a certain instinct for what the people want — and that he is far from being clever."³⁴ But he did have that sense for what the people wanted; his correspondence is large with phrases such as "public opinion demands it"³⁵ and "the people are with us."³⁶ The Conservative leader possessed more talent than that of consensus-taking, however; he was fully conscious of urban development and he demonstrated his awareness whether talking about the introduction of the automobile to city streets³⁷ or refusing to entertain the idea of prohibition. On the latter point he was quite precise:

So far as the Cities are concerned, let me say to you now what a man of high standing in religious circles in England said — "There is more drink caused by poverty than poverty caused by drink." Of course this may not be an exactly correct statement so far as rural districts are concerned.³⁸

The premier had no intention of introducing prohibition when his urban support might wither away as a consequence.

In addition, Whitney was stubborn and, once he had assumed a position, he was generally unmoveable. When the costs connected with hydro-electric transmission began to mount at an alarming rate and some of his cabinet colleagues hesitated for the first time, Whitney showed no intention of calling a halt for reasons that were principled, political, and partisan. "It seemed to me," he wrote to his Attorney-General, James Foy,

that we can not go back. We must go forward no matter what happens, and it is possible that circumstances may occur in addition to those which

³² G. M. Rose (ed.), *A Cyclopaedia of Canadian Biography: Being Chiefly Men of the Time* (Toronto: Rose Publishing Company, 1886), p. 726.

³³ Willison Papers, J. P. Whitney to J. S. Willison, December 26, 1912; A. H. U. Colquhoun, *Press, Politics and People: The Life and Letters of Sir John Willison, Journalist and Correspondent of "The Times"* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1935), pp. 171-172.

³⁴ Willison Papers, C. F. Hamilton to J. S. Willison, November 19, 1906.

³⁵ Whitney Papers, J. P. Whitney to T. S. Sproule, March 1, 1907.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, J. P. Whitney to W. M. Southam, February 21, 1908.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, J. P. Whitney to E. C. Drury, April 1, 1908.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, J. P. Whitney to T. E. Burke, February 12, 1906.

have occurred already which may justify some further legislation next Session. No matter how we look at it, it all comes back to this, that we must go on and not look back. There may be danger in the former, but there would be practical ruin and humiliation in the latter.³⁹

Beyond this, Whitney was conscious of the presence of socialism and its doctrines in twentieth century Ontario. As a consequence of a bitter strike in Hamilton, the embodiment of this development, Allen Studholme, Labour member from Hamilton East, sat in the legislature from 1906 to past the end of Whitney's career. Thus, when the Power Commission Amendment Act of 1909 roused such a storm of protest, Whitney could reply: "It is indeed a ghastly joke to charge the Ontario Government with being socialistic etc., when it is the bulwark in Canada by means of which such influences will be shattered."⁴⁰ He was ready to bend with the wind and not stand rigid and risk being broken. The world was changing and he was quite prepared to make careful alterations to accommodate the new age.⁴¹

Not all the credit for the attitude of the Conservative party should go to Whitney — perhaps not even the largest share. Around him were men in his cabinet — notably Adam Beck, James Foy and R. A. Pyne — who were of like mind. Long after Whitney was dead, one observer noted: "...much of Whitney's greatness was attributable to those he had the sagacity to gather round him..."⁴² The most influential person in Whitney's political life, however, was not a member of his cabinet at all but, rather, his former leader, William R. Meredith, who sat as Ontario Chief of Justice of the Court of Common Pleas while Whitney was premier. Meredith had led the Conservative party from 1879 to 1894 and, when he had been elevated to the bench in the latter year, one substantial Tory, Mackenzie Bowell, had heaved a sigh of relief. "Let me hope," he wrote Whitney, "that whatever new arrangements are made [about the leadership of the party], your policy will have less of the Republican and Radical character than in the past."⁴³ Despite his removal, Meredith retained that "Radical" character which so distressed Bowell.

Meredith became Chancellor of the University of Toronto in 1900, in succession to Edward Blake, and it is worth noting that Whitney's university policy became clearly articulated after that date. In addition, once Whitney became premier, the chief justice carefully scrutinized important bills before they were presented to the legislature and harshly criticized badly-worded sections; and he prodded Whitney whenever he

³⁹ *Ibid.*, J. P. Whitney to J. J. Foy, October 8, 1908.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, J. P. Whitney to A. J. Dawson, July 7, 1909.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, J. P. Whitney to P. H. Bowyer, October 16, 1909.

⁴² Willison Papers, M. H. Irish to J. S. Willison, June 26, 1923.

⁴³ P.A.C., Bowell Papers, Letterbook, M. Bowell to J. P. Whitney, October 6, 1894.

thought the reforming surge of his government was weakening.⁴⁴ In 1906, when the forces of private enterprise first began to muster to battle Whitney on the subject of hydro-electric power development, Meredith urged him to stand firm. "I sincerely hope," the former party leader wrote,

that you will not be, shall I say, stampeded into withdrawing or emasculating your power bill.

It is a safe & conservative measure. Nothing can be done without the action of the Commission on which the Government will be represented if it has not a majority of the members.

If the right to expropriate is exercised which is not likely to happen full compensation will be paid to the property owners and no bondholders [*sic*] rights need be disturbed.

...

It is I think more than probable that the main purpose the bill will serve will be to compel those who have a monopoly of the power to supply it at reasonable rates.⁴⁵

And, lastly, Meredith was the architect of the Workman's Compensation Act of 1914. His total influence is impossible to assess, but it must be conceded that it certainly was large.

"Progressive" Conservatism arose out of the changing nature of Ontario and its society and out of the response of a political party in tune with the times. It reflected the fact that the party owed few favours to those in high financial circles and it held out promises to the small manufacturer and the urban worker. It took some inspiration from a sensitive political leader like Whitney who, in turn, was made more acute by advice from Meredith. "Progressive" Conservatism not only responded to changed circumstances in Ontario; it shaped the province in the twentieth century through governmental intervention on a new and larger scale. But it troubled those who still thought of Conservatives and Liberals in a different sense. In the provincial election of 1908, the Conservatives finally took that old Grit stronghold of Brant South; and W. D. Gregory, a longtime political watcher in Ontario, was prompted to remark to the successful candidate: "A preAdamite [*sic*] Tory like yourself, however, will feel like a fish out of water when you get down among the radicals that make up the Government majority, and show how meaningless party names have become."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ U.W.O.L.A., Whitney Papers, W. R. Meredith to J. P. Whitney, November 13, 1905.

⁴⁵ In the author's possession, Whitney Papers, W. R. Meredith to J. P. Whitney, May 9, 1906.

⁴⁶ Queen's University Library Archives, Gregory Papers, Letterbook IV, W. D. Gregory to W. S. Brewster, June 9, 1908.